

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Pumping Fitness Into Your Day

Everyone knows keeping fit is important. But between getting the kids ready for school, commuting to the office, working all day and putting dinner together, it can sometimes seem impossible to find the time or energy for a workout.

Fitness, however, doesn't have to be a two-hour extravaganza of barbells and spandex; possibilities for getting exercise exist all around and can easily fit into your daily schedule. Here are some suggestions for making your day a little healthier:

Wake up, take a shower and stretch. A five- to 10-minute morning stretch, focusing on legs, arms, neck and back, is an excellent way to start your day, can improve your flexibility and range of motion, and can reduce your risk of injury.

Walk, walk and walk. Health experts agree that a 30- to 40-minute brisk walk at least three times a week can help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and maintain your overall level of fitness. Leave the car at home and walk to the office. If time or distance is an issue, look for other ways to incorporate walking into your day, such as taking the dog for a walk, running errands on foot or strolling on your lunch break.

Use the stairs. Next time you're at work, pass on the elevator and take the stairs. A good stair climb strengthens your legs and provides cardiovascular exercise. Make your mini-workout even more intense by skipping every other step.

Get physical. Look for ways to add physical movement to your daily activities. Deliver messages personally to your co-workers instead of using e-mail, or take a short walk at lunch instead of eating in the office or staff cafeteria. Short intervals of movement get the blood circulating and can help you maintain your energy levels throughout the day.

Turn up the music. Once you get home, put your favorite music into the CD player and crank up the volume. Dancing is an excellent and enjoyable way to blow off steam, burn calories, and can easily fit in to your daily schedule.

Give the cleaner a break. When you're cleaning, you're burning calories. Kill two birds with one stone and make your daily chores part of a workout by stringing several of them together - make the bed, take the clothes out of the dryer, then run upstairs and fold them. It'll not only keep your home spotless, but will also help you stay in shape.

Invest in an exercise video. Ready to hit the gym only to have all your energy and motivation disappear as soon as you get home from work? If that scenario sounds familiar, consider buying or renting an exercise video or DVD. There are literally hundreds of choices, covering every type of workout from tai chi to kickboxing. Before starting any exercise program, be sure to visit the doctor to assess your fitness level and determine what type of workout you're realistically capable of doing.

Put your goals in writing. The most effective way of achieving your fitness goals is to be consistent. Write down your strategy in detail. It's a lot harder to ignore your commitment when the printed words are right there in front of you. Once you've developed and recorded your plan, get in the habit of reviewing it when you feel unmotivated. Remember: The more frequently you exercise, the less tempted you'll be to skip your workout and turn on the TV.

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If you've been out of the exercise loop for a while, restarting your fitness program can seem daunting. But getting back into shape doesn't mean hopping on the nearest exercise bike and pedaling like a maniac or bench pressing like a bodybuilder. It means having a realistic, sustainable plan that fits with your busy schedule and puts you on track to a healthier lifestyle.